

Re-establish family time by changing how you do things for better results

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Building any type of relationship takes time, patience and forgiveness. This is especially true when you are talking about family and the issues we face in today's 24/7 world.

We are so caught up in working extra hours, getting our children to and from activities, helping others, lending a hand to our children's best buddy of the week and picking up the slack for our partner or lack thereof that it is easy to forget about family time.

Having received the same message – "Make it a family night" – through the media, co-workers, children's teachers and from my children, I too was guilty into trying to juggle four more activities into my already crazy day.

Oh sure, my intentions were honorable. I was on a mission to include at least half of my family in game nights, chatting sessions, walks and dinners.

I read article after article solely dedicated to time management and purposely targeted at moms. I know that a lot of helpful hints can be gained from these articles and that most are there as a resource guide, but would like to add that too much of something is not always a good thing.

I started paying attention to first organizing and then coordinating all the schedules. I had it worked out into 30-minute color-coded sections. This alone can drive anyone crazy because if you are like me, you look down at the clock in the car and

realize that you did not allow for practice to be 20 minutes late and, oh yeah, the youngest got sick all over the car and into her brother's shoes.

All of these acts alone are not bad and usually can be handled without too much of a fuss, but if you don't have the time to spare, then what?

It was at this point that I decided to start implementing a different kind of plan. I wanted to keep up with the schedule and remain organized, so I went online and found a couple of websites with different ideas and templates.

I gathered all of our schedules, calendars, planners and cell phones, put them on the table and began a master calendar. It's important to note that while looking all of this over, I kept thinking, "How did our parents and their parents manage all of this?" So I contacted relatives, asked questions and took lots of notes. This is what followed and my reasoning:

Organized carpooling

Carpooling details were not done in the traditional way. Usually whoever worked the closest, could get to the location and then back in the quickest amount of time was chosen. Instead, I made up a "best fit" chart.

This chart consisted of the children being driven and where they were being driven. For example, if it was a middle school trip to orchestra rehearsal, I would pair up age-appropriate children and friends with my husband. He has more patience for this and then I could be at

home focusing on other activities with the remaining children.

I added in a few other tricks as well. A big one is that in order to get in or out of the car, each child had to report two things they learned that day (sorry, but my car so my rules). These two acts solved two issues I was having, 1) Getting the children to open up about what was going on inside and outside of the classroom; and 2) Having the right parent with the right child or children at the best time, i.e., "best fit."

It is common knowledge that our children learn and respond differently to different parents, peers, authority figures and family. So if you think about how to get the most out of our time driving around, it makes sense.

Suddenly, there were discussions about school, teachers, peers and life in general. The children did not realize it, but the parents were actually listening and comparing notes. We became more aware of our children as individuals and were better prepared to deal with anticipated growing pains, issues, thoughts and changes they were going through.

Balancing

I cross-referenced lunch and dinner duties to coincide with little ones around. This is what I call "balancing."

My grandmother used say that part of raising a child involved teaching and even more importantly, listening. By including children in meal preparation, I was able to build up our relationship. Working

together on a regular basis helped me instill respect back into our home.

I listened to what they said and shared with me, which showed them that I valued and respected them. In return, they would show me respect and listen to what I was sharing.

Meal time became one of my most favorite times of the day. No longer was I constantly thinking and planning (well, OK, there was a little planning). The point is that the children and I not only looked forward to it, we also gained so much from it.

Our time

I decided to play around a little with a couple of things. I took two things away and re-sorted them in a different kind of way.

First, I took away the gym and second, I took away TV time. I then inserted 20-30 minutes of walking, skating or biking with each other. This I called "our time."

This one took some getting used to and I must admit that three out of four did not participate happily at first. We started out slow and it was usually a walk. I wanted to really concentrate on problem solving, self-expression, empathy and cooperation.

Because this physical activity was being implemented, surely I could easily instill just a couple of these qualities simply by insisting that we stick it out. This was easier to dream about than it was to actually implement.

I decided to tell stories instead of forcing the conversation. Oh sure, we have all heard our parents and grandparents say, "When I was young ..." usually followed by an exaggerated tale of walking miles in the snow just to get to school. I was determined to not be one of those, so I brought up examples and told them in the form of a story.

I asked the children questions like, "What would you do?" If one particular child had been reprimanded or was facing some sort of conflict, I started out the conversation by asking them questions. The answers I would offer were put in the form of a story and in this way they could come to their own conclusions.

Soon the children were talking about everything and on holidays there was a lot of laughter as they regaled the extended family with the stories. This brought up powerful memories and soon aunts, uncles and cousins alike were telling their take of various stories.

I am proud to say that after sticking with this new setup, my family shared special times together. I wrote this with the hope of helping other families who are finding themselves wishing for more than 24 hours in day.

This is not to say that readers will not have to make adjustments and tailor some of the suggestions to meet their family's needs. Here are two references that can help – mommytracked.com and familieswithpurpose.com.



Photo by Diane Rodriguez

Kai Florendo-Blomstrom (right, standing), a senior at Siletz Valley School, responds to a question from Oregon Youth Development Council representatives.

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in the student leadership program at Siletz Valley School met at the Tribal administration building to discuss issues facing Siletz youth.

This discussion focused on three questions:

1. What issues exist in the community that disconnect youth from schools or work?

2. What programs or services are needed in the community to reconnect those youth to school or work?
3. What mechanisms should be built into a funding model for youth development in the state of Oregon?

OYDC staff received a lot of responses from Tribal staff, the school principal, council members and students. They were

especially impressed with the high school leadership class, which had discussed the questions among themselves and selected several students to deliver their responses.

Concerns identified during the visit included drug and alcohol use and abuse, no focus on academic excellence in high school, no resources for extracurricular activities – music, fine arts, life skills, vocational training for youth and tutoring.